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SUBJECT: REFCOORD VISIT TO SUDANESE REFUGEE CAMP

REF: (A) 2006 BAGHDAD 4465 (B) BAGHDAD 1603

Classified By: POL COUNS MATT TUELLER FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (U) Summary: There are currently 128 Darfurian refugees camped on a highway median in west Anbar who continue to request third country resettlement. The camp is provided humanitarian assistance by UNHCR and the occupants are recognized as refugees by UNHCR and have been designated as eligible to make application for resettlement in the U.S. They have been visited twice in the last year by an Embassy Baghdad refugee coordinator with the stated intention of developing a plan to begin to process them for resettlement, but to date there has been no movement on these plans. The camp was visited again by the Embassy RefCoord, RSO, MNF/I, MNF/W, UNHCR and IOM on November 11, 2007. Following the camp visit all the international organization and USG components necessary to develop a plan to resolve this matter held a planning meeting. This cable is the initial phase of a plan to have the refugees processed. End Summary.

¶2. (U) RefCoord, RSO, MNF/I, MNF/W traveled to the camp on November 11 and met camp leaders and the manager of the UNHCR-engaged NGO who is providing assistance and did an assessment of camp conditions. Reftel (A) provides an account of how these particular Sudanese came to occupy the current camp. When the camp was last visited by the previous Refcoord there were 137 refugees, as described in reftel B, since then 9 of the camp occupants attempted to enter Syria for refugee processing, they were turned back at the border and are currently encamped at the Syrian border.

¶3. (U) The current camp is composed of 10 families, nine married couples with children and one widowed father with a child, (his spouse died in childbirth in the last year) and 87 single males. There are 31 children aged from 1 through 17 years. Refcoord met with the following camp leaders: Issa Abdullah (dob: 1961), Mohammed Ahmed (dob: 1962), Ibrahim Abdullah Mohammed (dob 1954) and Zacharia Abdullah Haroon (dob: 1952), two of them spoke English. The conversation was open and spontaneous. It should be noted that five of the spouses are female Iraqi nationals married to Sudanese males.

¶4. (U) The living conditions in the camp are grim. There are UNHCR labeled tents for shelter for some, others live in improvised cardboard shacks, there is one large tent for community events and several waterless latrines. Camp leaders confirm that conditions are deteriorating as the structures age; the structures are not meant for permanent living. The nutritional needs are met by funds provided by UNHCR to the Iraqi NGO Mercy Hand. The NGO director is Dr. Mohamed Taha, he was present during the Refcoord discussion with camp leaders. The camp leaders and Dr. Taha confirmed that the nutrition is basic but adequate to meet the needs, however, the water provided is not meant for consumption but, so far, has not caused an outbreak of illness (non-bottled water is used due to lack of funds adequate to purchased sterile bottled water.) Dr. Taha is an MD who is on the staff of two local hospitals and has been able with great

resourcefulness and at some expense to himself to see to the health needs of the camp: he has delivered several babies, has had several of the refugees admitted to local hospitals for treatment and does health exams during his frequent visits. It is Dr. Taha's assessment that the camp occupants currently do not suffer from any significant illnesses.

15. (U) Each head of a family and each single male has a UNHCR Protection Paper, a standard document stating that the bearer (named and pictured on the document) is a UNHCR recognized refugee and is by international convention entitled to protection, humanitarian assistance and should not be deported to their country of origin because of a credible fear of persecution. These documents are valid for one year (the world-wide standard) and expire at the end of December 2007.

16. (U) A primary ongoing concern for this group is targeting by local militia, sectarian groups, international terrorists and prejudicial treatment by local farmers. The group was questioned closely at various points in the interview about such targeting; the answers they gave were not consistent throughout the interview. They stated that they were targeted because they entered Iraq under the auspices of the Saddam regime and that they had been the target of threats for this and other reasons, one of which was that some Sudanese had been allowed to resettle in Israel, so they were identified as quote, enemies of Islam, unquote, despite being Muslim, themselves. When they were first asked about the targeting they stated that the last time they were specifically threatened was one year ago when they were visited by an unnamed militia and threatened with violence. Later in the interview, the account changed and they stated that the last visit was just three months ago. They suffer

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ongoing prejudicial remarks by local farmers and merchants because they are black African.

7. (U) Refcoord is particularly concerned about the potential of this group to be targeted. There is an ongoing fear that if this group becomes identified as significant to the USG and remains in their current vulnerable location they could be targeted and victimized by militias and others as a means of indirectly targeting the USG. This is a crucial concern should the refugee processing take place from the current location. In order to complete the processing, each person would have to be brought to Camp Korean Village (CKV) at least three times, this constant contact with a USG entity would increase their profile and perhaps raise their potential for retaliatory targeting. MNF/I will do a Risk Analysis of this potential for violence to determine if this is a manageable factor in the processing. UNHCR security will do their own internal assessment of this risk.

18. (U) Refcoord, MNF/I, RSO and the MNF/W security detail remained at the camp for the interview and inspection for approximately two hours. Fifteen minutes after our departure, UNHCR (the Iraq Rep designate, Protection Officer and Security Officer) and IOM operations officer, together with a US Marine security detail, arrived at the camp for their inspection and discussion with camp residents. The lack of overlap was deliberate to provide each group with an unbiased and independent assessment of the conditions. Following this latter group's camp visit both groups met for a planning meeting at CKV.

19. (U) Following the camp visit by each group there was a meeting at CKV involving the following individuals from the specified organizations:

- Dr. Lindamarie Wald Koenigter, FE-MC, DoS Senior Advisor DCS/STRATEFF/MNF
- COL Sam Evans, GBR, Deputy Military Advisor to UN SRSG - Iraq
- LTC Christina F. Flanagan, STRATEFF POL DIV/MNF-I

IDP/Refugee POC

- Mr. John Martinez, Special Agent, USMI Regional

Security Office

- MAJ Gail Owens, MNC-I C9 Plan, Force Generation/IDPs
- Mr. Pierre Francois Pirlot, UNHCR Representative to

Iraq, designated

- Mr. Alastair Campbell, UNHCR Senior Field Security

Advisor

- Mr. Khanin Ismail, UNHCR Protection Officer
- MAJ Maxwell, TF 2-7 IN, XO, 3 ID
- Mr. Ayman Ghaly, IOM Representative
- CPT Mark Balfartz, TF 2-7, IN, 3 ID
- CPT David Fitch, TF 2-7, B Company Commander, 3 ID
- CPT Thomas Frohnhoefer, TF 2-7 IN (S-3), 3 ID
- Mr. Michael Troje, Embassy Baghdad Refugee

Coordinator, chair of the meeting.

¶10. (U) PLAN A. There were two tentative plans that resulted from the above meeting. In the first plan, PLAN A, refugee processing would involve the Sudanese remaining at their current UNHCR camp location during the USRAP processing, being brought to CKV for the Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) and DHS processing in small groups and, when all approvals are finalized, those approved would be relocated to the U.S. through the assistance of the OPE. The plan would require the OPE to be established at CKV, the medical exams be conducted at CKV and for DHS to conduct their interviews at that camp. The OPE would then make arrangements for the accepted refugees to be transported to the U.S.

¶11. (U) Plan A implementers and tasks.

- IOM: This organization will establish and manage the OPE. The tasks of the OPE will include: - (1) arranging for the transportation of the refugees from the UNHCR camp to CKV, each refugee will likely have to be brought into CKV three times; (2) gathering all the required background information for the files and initiating the security checks required by USRAP; (3) acquiring and transporting to CKV the medical equipment necessary for the required physical exams for each refugee applicant (it should be noted that MNF/W, has rudimentary medical equipment and medical staff sufficient to meet the medical needs of the US military, but is not able to provide equipment or personnel for USRAP medical exams;) (4) arranging for the movement of the accepted refugees from their current location to the place of resettlement. IOM agreed to submit an initial plan to implement this program.
- RSO: Will submit a report on the COM personnel security requirements for this program. There will be COM personnel staffing the program and living at the camp during portions of the processing, RSO must approve these arrangements.
- MNF/W: They must approve the location of the OPE at the camp and has volunteered to construct the billeting, office and medical exam structures necessary for the processing.

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They agreed report on this proposal by 30 November. They also volunteered to make random security inspections of the UNHCR camp to deter targeting by militia or insurgents during the processing phase of the program, to deter targeting of the refugee population. They are also training Iraqi Highway Patrol and will instruct these law enforcement personnel to make routine inspections of the camp to alleviate security concerns.

- MNF/I: They will provide a risk analysis assessment concerning the security situation of the Sudanese refugees when they begin processing. Although there have been threats and occasional visits from militia and other insurgents, there has been no recent violence against occupants of the camp. There has been a fear expressed all along that when the processing begins and each individual is brought to CKV for three visits, which will be more than 50 bus loads of people entering and leaving CKV over what may be a several month period of time, the refugees could become targets because they may be identified as significant to the USG. In order to go forward with PLAN A, there must be intelligence that reports that this risk is minimal and controllable.

¶12. (U) PLAN B - When the various agencies and organizations submit their proposals concerning PLAN A, it will be determined whether or not this plan should move forward. If PLAN A is not feasible, PLAN B would be to move the entire group of refugees out of Iraq to a location where they could be safely processed for resettlement. The logistics of such an operation were not discussed at this meeting. It is believed that this would be a complex operation, involving locating a country that would allow the entry and temporary residence of the group, arranging for transport and clearing movement through transit countries.

¶13. (U) Post understands that processing this group of refugees from their current locale will pose a number of difficulties, however, the morale of this group continues to deteriorate and they remain vulnerable to violence and intimidation. Out of hopelessness of their situation 9 members of the camp recently attempted to cross the Syrian border in an effort to plead their case in another forum. UNHCR recognizes these Sudanese as refugees and the USG has accepted them as being eligible for USRAP. The situation demands that action be taken on this matter as soon as a safe and reasonable plan can be agreed upon. Post is awaiting the reports of the organizations as detailed in para 11. When these reports are received Post will submit a recommendation concerning the processing of this vulnerable refugee group.
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